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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "Economy in Wash Dresses." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

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Fashions in fabrics change with the years. One fabric may be most popular one season. Another may take its place the next. Cotton materials had their innings last year. Fortunately they are in again--only more so, this year. That's lucky for the lady who must dress on a slim pocketbook. For cotton material is both inexpensive and practical. Wash dresses cost little either in the making or in the upkeep. No expensive cleaning is necessary when you can tub a dress yourself, when soap and water, a good iron and board are all you need to keep your summer outfit looking trim and smart.

You'll find in the stores this spring cottons for almost any occasion. For summer house wear ginghams, percales and lawns are as good as ever. For afternoon wear, most of us will also choose old favorites like lawns or voiles, either in prints or in plain colors. For tailored street wear in summer, we no longer have to depend on silks or wools, for many cottons are now on the market, designed for just this use. Among these you'll find dark town prints in voile, some dark lawns and some other specially designed cottons for street use. Suits and coats you can make of some of the new rough cottons like ratine or cotton matelasse or similar "nubby" weaves. Such fabrics also make good-looking summer sports clothes. Your sportswear this year may be of pique, broadcloth, seersucker, ratine or other rough fabric. Finally, if you're making short-sleeved party dresses--perhaps for the young daughter in the family--you have a wide choice of fabrics in cotton. Voile prints, flowered or checked or plaid, organdie in all shades, laces and some of the sheer novelty cottons are all possibilities.

Now, let's consider good buys in cotton fabric. Before you purchase that attractive new print or that pretty new weave, here are some points to consider. First, will the material launder well? Cottons that won't wash satisfactorily are not worth buying. Will the color run? Look for a colorfast guarantee on the fabric. If it doesn't have such a label, take a sample home and test it. Next, will the material shrink? Notice the weave. Loosely woven fabrics or those with loosely twisted yarns often shrink badly, while a firm close weave shrinks very little. Many cotton fabrics that have been preshrunk are now available both in the piece and in ready-made garments. Sometimes you will find cloth with yarns that are crooked and look as if they had been badly pulled out of place when the material was finished. Such fabric has been over-stretched and will spring back to its original smaller size when washed. You may also find cotton fabric that has been heavily starched or "filled." This may look nice when new, but after the first washing it will be sleazy and lack body. So, for most satisfactory wear, choose light-weight, fairly smooth cottons of an even, firm, close weave in fast colors.

So much for the fabric. Now about the style and construction of your new wash dresses. Washing and ironing are hard on seams. So such dresses need to be made strong. A good pattern for a wash dress has simple lines and as few seams

or joinings as will make it fit nicely. Seams should be of a type that will not easily weaken or pull out when the dress is worn and washed. Of course, seams should also have a sturdy finish. For heavy cottons made up in the new mannish tailored styles, those flat fells used on men's shirts and middy blouses make a strong and suitable seam. But they are too conspicuous for a cotton dress of thin or sheer material. Your voils, lawns, and other sheer dresses look best with a French seam--a seam stitched first on the right side, pressed, then turned and stitched again on the wrong side. That's one of the easiest seams to make, provided you make your iron help you. Gingham because they are heavier and not transparent, may be self-stitched--that is, after making a plain seam, the edges may be turned under once and stitched just inside the fold to prevent raveling, with the seam itself pressed flat. With very heavy firm materials like pique or broadcloth you can use a plain seam with the edges finished by pinking. The less bulky the seam, the easier the garment will be to iron.

Now, a few points to avoid in making wash dresses. Avoid curved or extremely diagonal seams. They are almost impossible to make durable enough to stand frequent washing. They tend to stretch and spoil the fit, and the stitching often breaks when a seam stretches. Such curved or diagonal joinings also usually require clipping or cutting out the fabric underneath. That is likely to weaken a wash garment. As for difficult pleatings which take time in ironing or shirrings or any sort of fragile or unwashable trim, of course these are poor choices for wash dresses.

Speaking of washing and ironing, reminds me of sleeves. The short puff sleeves so popular this year are very appealing until you iron them. Then the chances are, that you'll run into difficulty. One way of avoiding this is to gather the sleeve on elastic. Cut a strip of elastic the right size for your arm. Sew a hook at one end and an eye at the other. Then turn a hem around the edge of the sleeve that will allow the elastic to slip in and out. Remove it before laundering. Then you can iron the sleeve out flat. You may prefer a circular sleeve instead as it gives nice effect and ~~isn't~~ is so troublesome to iron. Short sleeves are very much "in" this season. That is good news for the practical seamstress. For short sleeves are most comfortable for summer wear, they stay clean longer than long sleeves, they require less material and they are easier to make and to iron. You can take your choice of styles. Elbow-length, short puffed sleeves, tiny shoulder caps or sleeveless styles are all good this year.

Now about the question of fastenings. That's especially important for wash dresses. Snaps and hooks may get crushed in the wringer or under the iron. Buttons with shanks or thick tops often suffer the same fate. Fabric-covered buttons with metal shanks are so likely to rust that they are poor choices for wash dresses. Flat, washable buttons, such as mother of pearl or bone, are probably the most practical fastenings. And by the way, for belts buttons are as smart as buckles this year--and much less expensive. You can fasten your belt with a button costing a few cents and be just as much in style as if you used a fifty-cent buckle.

Friday, we'll talk about cooking meat to conserve food value and plan our Easter dinner.

